

Support for House Bill No. 6503 – AAC The Siting of Anaerobic Digestion Facilities on Farms.

March 21, 2021

Senator Cohen, Representative Gresko and distinguished members of the Environment Committee:

I am writing in support of House Bill No. 6503 – AAC The Siting of Anaerobic Digestion Facilities on Farms.

On-farm anaerobic digesters are an innovative solution to a number of challenges not only to our Connecticut farmers struggling to survive, but also to solid waste management in general, water quality management, food security, and to helping meet the State's open space goals. In eastern Connecticut, agriculture is part of our lifeblood. Streamlining the permit process for our farmers will provide them with increased stability in their operations and help to lower the cost of innovation. Allowing farmers to take on additional waste from outside their farms will address several concerns discussed below.

As a Coventry Councilwoman, this raised bill has particular interest to me. First, Hytone Farms in Coventry is at this very time in the process of seeking permitting for an on-farm AD. This local family farm, a member of the Farmers Cow cooperative, continues to seek every opportunity to keep itself running despite challenges posed by loss of land for raising crops and other economic hurdles. In addition, as a municipality that strives to meet the State's open space goals, we count the farm as part of our open space percentage.

Farmers can use anaerobic digesters to manage farm-generated organic wastes and manure as well as increase revenue streams by selling the renewable energy the digesters generate. The digesters also help with manure waste management, saving dollars for the farmer while addressing runoff contaminants in our watersheds. Our town prides itself on Coventry Lake which has high water quality and provides numerous recreational opportunities - including a state owned boat launch - as well as important revenue to the town. It is in our best interest to make sure the Coventry Lake watershed is well managed.

Further, the bill under consideration will allow farmers to increase their revenues by taking on additional food waste from outside their farms. As you have read in testimony from the Connecticut Farm Bureau, farmers can do this while remaining in compliance with the environmental requirements in their comprehensive nutrient management plan. Also important is that by taking this food waste for the anaerobic digesters the farmers are helping alleviate the massive solid waste management crisis that CT now faces. In Coventry we are already problem solving to figure out how we can confront this crisis in a way that does not overburden our taxpayers and doesn't send our waste problems across state borders.

I trust that concerns raised by DEEP can be addressed in ways that satisfy environmental protection concerns while honoring our commitment to local agriculture and the important role it plays in our state for our economy, for food security, for clean water management and so much more.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill,

Lisa Thomas
Councilwoman, Coventry, CT